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Excerpt from a Radio Talk by
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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Sea Foods

Mussels are considered a delicacy by many who enjoy sea foods. No doubt many of you recall the recent warnings issued by the California State Department of Health, advising against the consuming of either Mussels or Clams taken during the months of July and August from off the California Coast. My friends, here is a peculiar thing. Until about four years ago Mussels were eaten with relish throughout the entire year and apparently with no ill effects. During the month of July, 1927, 102 people were seriously poisoned and six died from eating them. The Mussels were taken at points quite close to San Francisco. The area in which acute poisonings have occurred extends from Pacific Grove in the south to the Russian River in the north. Experts connected with the Hooper Foundation of the University of California have determined that this poisonous material is probably the result of a metabolism influenced in part by the spawning condition of the shellfish in that area. The poisonous ingredient or toxin has to date not been identified chemically. Poison outbreaks similar to those occurring in California have upon occasion been observed in Germany, England, Scotland, Denmark and France. Remember, now, heed the State Health Department's warning each year and eat no Mussels during the warm summer months.

Mussels are not canned in this country but some are occasionally imported. Do you know what Mussels Bordeaux Style are? Such a product is imported into the United States in cans. They are mussels on the half-shell and are so served to you. Should you buy a can of that product the net weight stamped on the package will include the weight of the shells as well as the meat portion -- a pretty expensive luxury.

I had an interesting experience a year ago. I refer to Japanese canned crab -- quite a delicacy with many of you folks. It is imported in large quantities. Here's something you don't know: There are four grades of that crab-meat that come to the United States. If the product is of fancy grade, one which contains meat composed chiefly of the large leg pieces, of nice appearance, and perfect as to packing and processing, the case bears the word "Fancy" stamped in red. The cases of the next best grade bear a stamp reading "Choice" in blue letters. In this grade the meat is also from the leg portion but the pieces are somewhat smaller and there may be slight imperfections in the technique of packing which are probably apparent only to experts. If the cases bear a green stamp reading "Fair" it means the product is of fair quality only. The flakes are smaller and more come from the body portion of the crab instead of the legs. The last grade takes a purple stamp on the case with the words "Passed A," which means that the contents consist chiefly of the smaller body portions of meat, with or without some of the slenderer portions of leg meat.

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Importers and wholesale dealers in crabmeat buy on the basis of grades. As a consumer of crabmeat, are you not entitled to that information on the can label?

A year ago there came to my attention an importation of canned crabmeat different from anything previously coming to the United States. It was followed immediately by other shipments of a similar character. Your Food and Drug agents did not release that crab for sale and distribution. We knew you would be disappointed should you purchase a can of that material, believing you were getting the canned crab with which you were familiar. We detained the shipments and called a meeting of Japanese importers. We found out that this was a new crab from Korean waters. On the top and bottom of each can were three flat leg pieces, while the entire center contents consisted of thread-like or hairy filaments of crabmeat. The taste was different from that of crabmeat previously imported. The hearing developed that it was probably the hairy, or dromia, crab. Arrangements were effected to have all future importations so labeled. The Japanese government investigated and found that it was not the Dromia, but rather the Korean crab and was known as such throughout the Orient. When you buy canned crabmeat -- read the label. If it is labeled "Korean Crab" it should cost you less money than you are accustomed to paying, since it is not a superior product.

Coming back to oysters -- an oyster takes its food from the water in which it lives. It actually drinks, and this drinking feature leads me to a story in which I know you will be interested. Some years ago I went into an oyster producing section when it was generally the practice for all oyster shippers to float or soak their oysters after shucking them. That is a way to make five gallons of oysters out of four, and it involves a violation of the Food and Drugs Act.

In the locality of which I speak there were operated four oyster shucking plants. Immediately after shucking, the oysters were rinsed in fresh water, then placed in a receptacle of fresh water to stand for a period of twelve to twenty-four hours. After such soaking each 4 gallons of oysters had become five gallons. The shippers then drained off the fresh water and shipped out the cans of supposedly solid oyster meat. How do you suppose your Government agents were able to prove to the satisfaction of a court and jury, if necessary, that these oyster men were watering their oysters? Let me tell you. The inspector would take samples of those oysters from the shucking tables. He had them shucked, rinsed them in fresh water to the extent that the manufacturer was justified in doing. He then packaged them carefully and shipped them to the United States Food Laboratory for examination. At the same time he observed what was being done with the balance of the oysters shucked. If they were being floated, that night or the next day he would go to the express office and wire out to his fellow food and drug agents that shipments of these watered oysters were enroute to their territory. At the markets some of the oysters were purchased by another of your Food and Drug agents who sent them to the laboratory where the unfloated oysters had been sent. There a comparative analysis would conclusively prove the adulteration with added water. The ethical dealers -- who are in the majority -- wash the oysters in brackish or

salt water of a saline content equal to that from which the oysters come. When that is done you don't get 20% by volume of added water at an oyster price. Numerous Notices of Judgments list the names of those oyster dealers who tried to ship you water at an oyster price -- and the penalties assessed against them.

On the Pacific Coast, in the vicinities of Olympia and Bellingham, Washington, is found a native oyster much smaller than the Eastern or Gulf varieties. All are sold in the shell or as freshly shucked oysters. Efforts to transplant and propagate the eastern oyster in Pacific waters in the vicinity of San Francisco or in Puget Sound have been unavailing. The water is apparently too cold for their successful propagation. It was formerly quite a business to ship carloads of small shell oysters from the east and grow them to maturity at several points on this coast. When you buy fresh eastern oysters, remember, the largest are called "Counts," the next size "Selects;" after that come "Extra Standards" and the small ones, "Standards" or "Medium." Those terms are relative. A "Count" oyster from one locality may be larger than one from another place, depending on the average size of oysters from the respective producing areas.

Usually on the cans of shucked oysters that reach points throughout the west is to be found a number: for example, MD-118 would mean that the State of Maryland had issued Certificate No. 118 to the packer putting up that package. The certificate number further indicates the establishment of the packer has met the requirements of the State issuing the certificate as to sanitary conditions of his plant, employees and product. Those certificates before issuance by the State authorities must be approved by the United States Public Health Service and that Service assists the State authorities in controlling the sanitation of oyster growing, handling and packing. The reason for these precautionary measures is to insure that oysters be not taken from polluted waters, because such oysters would be violative of the terms of the Food and Drugs Act. Since the United States Public Health Service instituted this sanitary control measure you have not read of any typhoid outbreaks attributed to oysters.

My friends, when you buy shucked oysters do not let your dealer give you a product containing more than a very small amount of free liquid. If he does your oysters are in all probability adulterated with added water. I have seen oysters in dispensing containers wherein is much liquid and few oysters. Those oysters which stand in fresh water in dispensing containers lose their flavor, due to leaching out of soluble solids. They are inferior, and in all probability, five gallons was originally four. The oyster swelled.

Usually on canned oysters you will observe the word "Cove." That term formerly had a significance, indicating the oysters were taken from a sheltered bay. It is now practically synonymous with canned oysters. The oysters generally employed in canning are of the uncultivated variety, smaller in size than those which reach you in the shucked condition. In the process of canning they shrink considerably because of the steaming process employed. I might mention that a "Select" or "Standard" grade of shucked oyster will in no way be comparable with the same designations in canned oysters. I have told

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you the canned oysters are always smaller. Oysters are always canned in brine solution and you can depend upon your food authorities to see that the cans contain the necessary amount of oyster meat. Too much brine is bad for your pocket book and the canner's continuation of a successful business.

Canned clams are packed much as are oysters, that is, they are generally packed in brine. There are three varieties canned in the United States, the soft shell clam of the eastern coast, the hard shell clam of Puget Sound -- both the "Little Necks" and "Butter Clams" -- and the soft shell clam of the Washington coast, the Razor Clam, with which many of you are familiar.

Do you know that canned shrimp is packed in two styles? There is the dry pack and the wet pack. The label will tell you which. Your food authorities watch the output of shrimp quite closely. Some of your Government agents can by the shaking of a can of dry pack shrimp determine pretty accurately whether the product was good or bad before canning. Canned shrimp, like canned oysters, always carries a net weight declaration. Most packers declare the actual weight of oyster meat or shrimp that you will find within the tin, the reason being that the Government has established certain amounts of those products as necessary in the respective sizes of cans generally employed.

You may occasionally encounter other sea foods. There is canned lobster. When labeled "Lobster," only the meat of the true lobster can be used. Products labeled "Rock Lobster," "Spring Lobster" and "Spiny Lobster" are not true lobster but are sea crawfish and the labels will not bear pictures of the true lobster.
